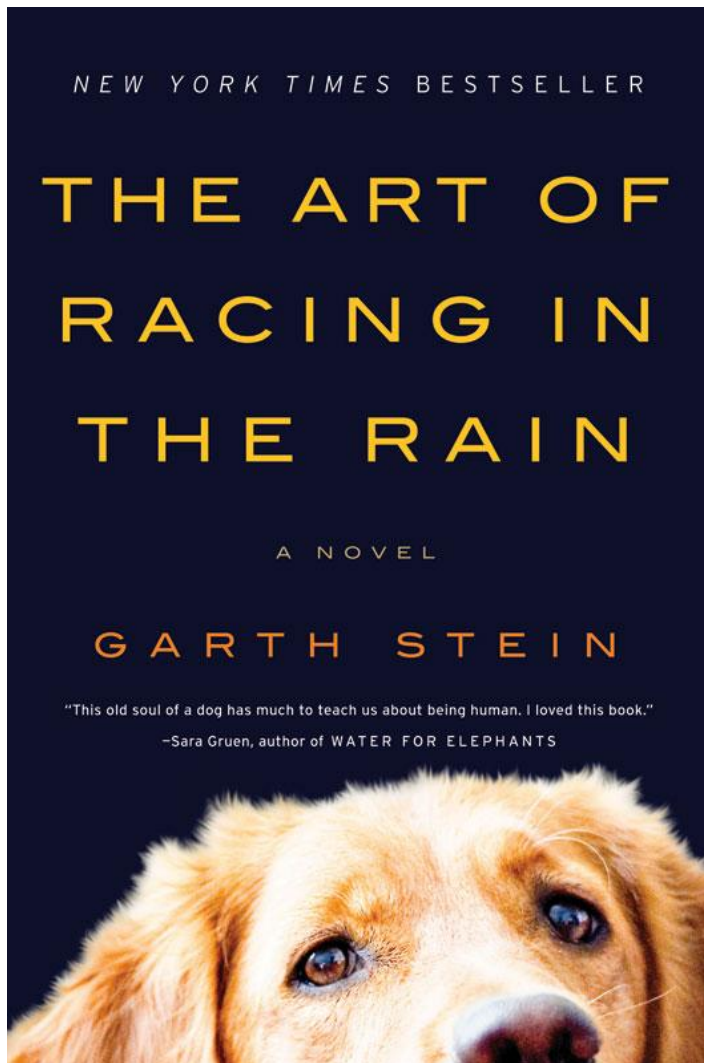


The Art of Racing in the Rain

Garth Stein



"The perfect book for anyone who knows that some of our best friends walk beside us on four legs; that compassion isn't only for humans; and that the relationship between two souls...meant for each other never really comes to an end."

- Jodi Picoult, author of *House Rules*

"I savored Garth Stein's *The Art of Racing in the Rain* for many reasons: a dog who speaks, the thrill of competitive racing, a heart-tugging storyline, and--best of all--the fact that it is a meditation on humility and hope in the face of despair."

-Wally Lamb, author of *She's Come Undone* and *I Know This Much Is True*

"...one of those stories that may earn its place next to Richard Bach's 'Jonathan Livingston Seagull,' Paulo Coelho's 'The Alchemist,' and Yann Martel's 'Life of Pi'...It's magic indeed..."

- *The Portland Oregonian*

"Stein's Enzo is the perfect narrator, wickedly observant of the world around him, even if limited in his ability to interact with humans..."

- *The Seattle Times*

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By Julie Klam

About the Book

Enzo narrates his life story, beginning with his impending death. Enzo's not afraid of dying, as he's seen a television documentary on the Mongolian belief that a good dog will reincarnate as a man. Yes, Enzo is a dog. And he belongs to Denny: husband, father, customer service technician. Denny's dream is to be a professional race-car driver, and Enzo recounts the triumphs and tragedies-medical, financial, and legal-they share in this quest, the dangers of the racetrack being the least of their obstacles. Enzo ultimately teaches Denny and the reader that persistence and joie de vivre will see them through to the checkered flag. Stein (*Raven Stole the Moon*) creates a patient, wise, and doggish narrator that is more than just fluff and collar.

- *Library Journal*

About the Author

Garth Stein is the pen name of Comet, a golden retriever mutt who dictates his profound and brilliantly plotted novels to his owner, the real Garth Stein, who likes to take credit for Comet's brilliant work and insights into canine minds.



As for Garth, the author of *New York Times* bestselling literary novel *The Art of Racing in the Rain* (Harper, 2008), he's been busy touring independent bookstores and writing his next, as yet untitled novel (with Comet's help). Published in 23 languages so far, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* has received a 2008 Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Book Award, and has been made a #1 BookSense selection and a Starbucks book selection. Garth's previous novels include *How Evan Broke His Head and Other Secrets*, which also won a PNBA award and was a BookSense pick, and *Raven Stole the Moon*. So far, Comet (the real genius behind these books) has enjoyed all of the awards and critical acclaim, but wishes they came with dog biscuits.

With an M.F.A. in film from Columbia University (1990), Garth worked as a documentary filmmaker for several years, and directed, produced, or coproduced several award-winning films. Garth also took the time to write a full-length play, *Brother Jones*.

Born in Los Angeles and raised in Seattle, Garth's ancestry is diverse: his mother, a native of Alaska, is of Tlingit Indian and Irish descent; his father, a Brooklyn native, is the child of Jewish emigrants from Austria. After spending his childhood in Seattle and then living in New York City for 18 years, Garth returned to Seattle, where he currently lives with his wife, three sons, and their dog, Comet.

Interview with the Author

Q: Where did the idea for the book come from?

A: The first seed for this book was planted in my mind about ten years ago. I was no longer working in documentary films, but a friend asked me to consult on the U.S. distribution of a film he knew about from Mongolia, called "State of Dogs." I took a look at the film and the press material they had on it. I didn't end up getting involved with the film, but the idea really stuck with me. In Mongolia, there is a belief that the next incarnation for a dog is as a man. I thought this was a cool concept and I tucked it away thinking I might someday do something with it.

Then, in 2004, I saw Billy Collins speak at Seattle Arts and Lectures. He's a great poet and a terrific reader. He read a poem, *The Revenant*, which is told from the point of view of a recently euthanized dog as he addresses his former master from heaven. The poem begins, "I am the dog you put to sleep...come back to tell you one simple thing: I never liked you—not one bit." I loved this poem. When Billy Collins finished reading, I knew I had to write a story from the point of view of a dog. And my dog would know the truth: that in his next incarnation, he would return to earth as a man.

So I had the character and the goal, but I still needed the framework of a story. A close friend of mine, who is a semi-professional race car driver but who supplements his racing by working behind the counter at an upscale automotive repair shop, was going through some personal difficulties. His plight wasn't Denny's, but it gave me some ideas about what happens to families when one member suddenly passes away. I developed a story that would really put my main character, Denny, through his paces, and then it was all there for me.

Q: What inspired you to tell the story from a dog's point of view?

A: Using a dog as a narrator has limitations and it has advantages. The limitations are that a dog cannot speak. A dog has no thumbs. A dog can't communicate his thoughts except with gestures. Dogs are not allowed certain places. The advantages are that a dog has special access: people will say things in front of dogs because it is assumed that a dog doesn't understand. Dogs are allowed to witness certain things because they aren't people and have no judgment.

I was able to work with this idea a lot in terms of giving the reader a unique viewpoint into the action of the book. Enzo goes off with Zoë, and while Denny, her father, doesn't know what happens, we see through Enzo's eyes and so we do know. In that sense, it was a lot of fun playing with this "fly on the wall" point of view. Especially since the "fly" in our case, is Enzo, who has very keen powers of observation.

Q: Do you think people will look at their own dogs differently after reading this book?

A: I hope so. Anyone who has a dog knows that they have some very deep thoughts, that they have moods and emotions, they get their feelings hurt. It's not a far reach to give them opinions and values and long-term desires.

The racing scenes deliver a real adrenaline rush and a feel for the intricacies of the sport. Is this seemingly expert knowledge based on personal experience or extensive research?

When I moved back to Seattle in 2001, I got involved in "high performance driver education," which is a fancy way of saying I learned to drive a car really fast on a race track. That soon led to my getting my racing license with the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA). While I did fairly well as a driver (I won the points championship in the NW region Spec Miata class in 2003), I didn't really have the skill as a mechanic or the time and money needed to really excel. When I crashed my car pretty badly—ironically, while racing in the rain—I decided to semi-retire from racing, and now I only race enough to keep my license current.

The funny thing is that while I love cars, I never really thought of myself as a "car guy." When I finished the draft of this book, my wife said, "So *that's* why you were racing. You were doing research!" I guess, on a subconscious level, that's what I was doing.

Q: What lessons can we all learn from Enzo?

A: I'm not sure that's for me to judge. But I would say the important things for me are twofold.

First, Enzo's mantra: "That which you manifest is before you." I think it's very important to take charge of your life, not to feel like you're a victim of circumstance or fate, but that you are an active participant in your future. It's not a new idea: "And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make." (Lennon/McCartney) Where I focus my energy always matches what comes back to me in my life.

Secondly, Enzo's epiphany—the thing he learns at the end of his life—is that his assumption that race car drivers have to be selfish to be successful, is incorrect. In fact, he determines, in order to be successful, a race car driver has to be completely selfless. He must cease looking at himself as the brightest star in the solar system, and begin to see himself as simply a unique aspect of the universe around him—and, most importantly, as an extension of the universe around him. In this way, a race car driver sheds his ego; his actions become pure and as powerful as the entire universe, which in turn leads to success.

All athletes speak about the mental element of athletics, and it usually boils down to the same thing: if you can remove your ego from the game, you can function with much more clarity and you are more likely to succeed. Wouldn't it be interesting if we all began speaking about the mental element of our lives in this way? How would our lives change if we did?

Discussion Questions

1. Some early readers of the novel have observed that viewing the world through a dog's eyes makes for a greater appreciation of being human. Why do you think this is?

2. Enzo's observations throughout the novel provide insight into his world view. For example:

"The visible becomes inevitable."

"Understanding the truth is simple. Allowing oneself to experience it, is often terrifically difficult."

"No race has ever been won in the first corner; many races have been lost there."

How does his philosophy apply to real life?

3. In the book's darkest moments, one of Zoe's stuffed animals—the zebra—comes to life and threatens him. What does the zebra symbolize?

4. Can you imagine the novel being told from Denny's point of view? How would it make the story different?

5. In the first chapter, Enzo says: *"It's what's inside that's important. The soul. And my soul is very human."* How does Enzo's situation—a human soul trapped in a dog's body—influence his opinions about what he sees around him? How do you feel about the ideas of reincarnation and karma as Enzo defines them?

6. Do you find yourself looking at your own dog differently after reading this novel?

7. In the book, we get glimpses into the mindset and mentality of a race car driver. What parallels can you think of between the art of racing and the art of living?

8. The character of Ayrton Senna, as he is presented in the book, is heroic, almost a mythic figure. Why do you think this character resonates so strongly for Denny?